RELIGION AND YOUR CHILD

A SYMPOSIUM ON PROBLEMS OF HUMANIST PARENTS

MARGARET KNIGHT
PROF. C. A. MACE
DR. CYRIL BIBBY AND OTHER CONTRIBUTORS

1s net

Frequent mention of "Parents" & "Humanist" Household assumes agreement.
Generally woman responsible for religious attitude
Attended prayers & "it hasn't done me any harm"
but probably has - Integrity destroyed? Important in science, art & business - (Morgan)
To discuss religion "indecent exposure"
Interested in mechanical & scientific things.

Connexion betw Soul & ethics.
Ethics man-made can be altered by man.

The Perfect example. Weight of responsibility in being autonomous.

RELIGION AND YOUR CHILD

A SYMPOSIUM ON
PROBLEMS OF HUMANIST PARENTS

MARGARET KNIGHT
PROF. C. A. MACE
DR. CYRIL BIBBY

and other
contributors

THE RATIONALIST PRESS ASSOCIATION LTD
40 DRURY LANE, LONDON, WC2

First published 1959
(Reprinted from 'The Humanist', May 1959)

© *Rationalist Press Association Ltd* 1959

Printed in Great Britain by Villiers Publications Ltd,
Ingestre Road, London, NW5, and published by the
Rationalist Press Association Ltd,
40 *Drury Lane, London, WC2*

TELLING CHILDREN ABOUT GOD

Margaret Knight

SOONER or later, all humanist parents have to face the problem of what to tell their children about God and religion. I made some suggestions on this subject in 1955, in two broadcasts that caused some excitement; and since then I have had a great deal of correspondence and discussion with parents, both Christian and humanist. Two questions that have often been raised are: first, Should children, even if their parents are humanists, be taught orthodox religious beliefs to begin with?; and second, Should parents exercise their right to withdraw children from religious instruction at school?

With rather surprising frequency, the view is put forward that, since Christianity is the official religion of this country, it may be wise to give children a conventional religious training at first, in the hope that they will later outgrow dogmatic Christianity as painlessly as they outgrow the belief in Santa Claus. This is a defensible policy, and no doubt it often works satisfactorily, but there are some strong arguments against it.

I am myself enough of an old-fashioned rationalist to think that it is a bad thing for a child to realize that his parents have deliberately misled him; it shakes his confidence in the trustworthiness of adults and in the value of intellectual integrity. Some critics may feel that this is a shade portentous, and will ask 'What about Santa Claus?' To which I would reply impenitently that I would not teach a child to believe in a 'real' Santa Claus, any more than in a 'real' Red Riding Hood. Disillusionment on this subject is not always as painless as it appears in retrospect; and as soon as a child is old enough to distinguish between fact and make-believe he should, in my view, be allowed to realize that Santa belongs to the realm of

make-believe—though, of course, to that enjoyable kind of make-believe in which we all like to take part.

In the second of my notorious broadcasts I made some suggestions about the sort of thing that humanist parents could suitably say to a young child about God. They could tell the child that everyone believed at one time, and some people believe now, that there are two great powers in the world: a good power, called God, who made the world, and who loves human beings, and who wants them to love one another, and to be happy and good; and a bad power called the Devil, who is opposed to God, and who wants people to be unhappy and bad. Some people still believe this, but nowadays most people in this country, except the Roman Catholics, think there is not really a Devil—the Devil is something like the ogres and witches in the fairy-tales. And some people nowadays think there is not really a God, any more than there is really a Santa Claus—though we often like to talk as though there were. The child will then undoubtedly ask what his parents believe, and he can be told that they do not think there is really a God, but that many people think otherwise, and that he can make up his own mind when he is older.

Since I made these suggestions, several parents have argued that it is putting too great a strain on a child to expect him to decide his religious beliefs for himself. But this is a misunderstanding. *Eventually* a child will have to make up his own mind about his religious, as about his political, views, but he is not expected to do so now. For the moment he will no doubt be a little humanist, just as he will be a little Socialist or a little Conservative, or whatever his parents are. But it does not (surely) disturb a child to know that his parents vote for one party at election time and that many of his friends' parents vote for another, and that he will have to decide how he himself will vote when he grows up. *Mutatis mutandis,* he can be told the same about religion.

Should humanist parents exercise their right to withdraw children from school prayers and religious instruction? My view is that in the great majority of cases they should not. At the Primary School, reasons of organization in any case usually make it impracticable. In exceptional circumstances a child

may be withdrawn without difficulty—for example, if the 'RI' period comes at the beginning or end of the day, so that the child can arrive late or leave early; if a number of children have been withdrawn, and alternative occupation is provided for them; or if there is a school library or indoor playroom in which the child can amuse himself. But in most Primary Schools none of these conditions obtain, and the only occupation available to the child who does not attend the 'RI' class is to wait outside in the corridor—which in many Primary Schools is a recognized form of punishment. Apart from this, withdrawal gives an 'odd man out' feeling which most children dislike intensely; and it may invest religious instruction with the glamour of the forbidden—I know of one child who spent the 'RI' period listening at the keyhole to find out what he was missing!

In any case, 'RI' at the Primary School is usually fairly innocuous. It is often given by teachers who are themselves only nominally Christian, and may consist of little more than the reading or telling of carefully-selected Bible stories, without any great emphasis on their literal truth. In such cases I should not withdraw a child even if it were practicable. The Bible stories are part of our cultural heritage, as are the stories of St. George and the dragon and King Arthur and his knights, and it would be a deprivation to the child not to hear them.

The situation is more difficult if the teacher is a fervent Christian and tells her pupils that it is wrong not to believe what the Bible says. In such circumstances, humanist parents have no option but to tell the child clearly that the teacher is mistaken. This is an unfortunate necessity since it sets up a conflict between two authorities; but it is a lesser evil than exposing the child to the intellectual bewilderment—and possible emotional disturbance—that may arise when he tries (for example) to reconcile Heaven and the Ascension with Sputniks and space travel. To try to bridge the gap by the use of terms like 'symbolically true' is, in my view, profoundly wrong. Few virtues are more important than intellectual integrity, and few things are more likely to damage it than that the child should be encouraged, at an early age, to play fast and loose with words like 'truth' and 'believe.'

At the Secondary School, at all events at the senior level, the 'RI' problem takes on a different aspect, and here the question of withdrawal may be left to the child himself. He can be told that his parents will withdraw him if he likes, but that they are quite willing to leave the decision to him. I am strongly of the opinion that the child should not be pressed to decide for withdrawal, still less withdrawn against his will. No one, I feel, should be expected to suffer for any convictions but his own.

There are undoubtedly still some difficulties involved, both for parent and child, when the child is brought up outside the bounds of the official State religion. But humanism is rapidly becoming respectable, and the difficulties are less formidable than they were. They are certainly far less than the difficulties of trying to combine a twentieth-century scientific outlook with a literal belief in folk-lore.

RELIGIOUS PROPAGANDA IN SCHOOLS

C. A. Mace

IT is, of course, the duty of parents to protect their children against subversive propaganda, and all propaganda is subversive if it is aimed at undermining the beliefs and values which a child has received from his parents. Parents cannot avoid the responsibility for the inculcation of values, or for conveying to their children their own beliefs about Nature and life. Responsible teachers in general recognize this fact. A Left-wing teacher will not attempt to change the political opinions of children of Right-wing parents, and a Right-wing teacher will exercise the same restraint in talking to children of Left-wing parents.

One might expect the same principles to apply in regard to religious opinions. It is not less subversive for a Christian teacher to proselytize the children of agnostics than for an agnostic teacher to undermine the beliefs of Christian children. But though not less subversive it is much more common. The one is permitted by our educational system—the other is not. It is therefore quite understandable that humanist parents should be inclined to ask that their children should not be required to attend classes for religious instruction. Though understandable, however, this policy is exposed to serious objections.

There is a different and better solution. Some of the basic principles are clear. They apply with equal force to all controversial issues and to all disputed values. They govern the rights and duties of Christian parents in regard to the upbringing of their children, and they apply to the rights and duties of humanist parents in the upbringing of theirs. They apply to political as well as to religious indoctrination.

Parents must protect their children, and to do this even the most democratic or permissive parents must behave in what

might seem to be an authoritarian way. They must often say to their children, 'You must do this, and you mustn't do that —and you must do this and not do that, just because I say so. Later on, I will try to explain why I say you must do this and you mustn't do that, and you will then be able to decide for yourself whether I am right or wrong.'

Parents must take this authoritarian line to save their children from physical danger, to induce them to eat and drink the things that are good for them and not to eat and drink things that would make them ill. In the same way, parents will 'indoctrinate' their children with the beliefs and values which they themselves regard as of vital importance. But in taking this seemingly autocratic line sensible parents will prepare themselves for the Day of Judgment—not the day when the last trump sounds, but the much earlier day when the children will rightly pass judgment on the wisdom or unwisdom of their parents. It will indeed not be so very long before the children will be as fully competent as the parents to decide what risks can be reasonably taken, what they shall eat and drink, what they shall believe and disbelieve, and to judge for themselves what is right and what is wrong.

Sensible parents will not conceal their own beliefs and disbeliefs, but on controversial questions of philosophy, religion, and politics they will say as soon as is appropriate: 'This is what I believe, but I may be wrong. There are other people who take a different view. Later on, you will form your own opinion.' The 'Day of Judgment' will extend over many years, and sensible parents will follow a policy of progressive relaxation of authority, of responsibility, and of progressive explanation of grounds and reasons for their beliefs and decisions. The implementation of this policy can be unhurried. There is no good reason why young children should be deprived of the enjoyment of fairy tales and mythologies, and young children like to believe that all tales are true.

No great harm need follow if a child believes in fairies, or in Father Christmas, or in the story of Eden, or the story of Jonah and the Whale, or the story of the miracle of the loaves and fishes. It is important for children to acquire a fairly detailed and not unsympathetic awareness of Greek, Jewish and Christian

mythology. Without this they can be expected to understand and appreciate little in Western art. It is soon enough if the question of fact or fiction be treated seriously only when it becomes a matter of serious interest to the child himself. When disillusionment is gradual and continuous it is proportionately painless.

If, in the earlier years, the parent must accept the chief responsibility for the child's beliefs and values, when the child goes to school this responsibility must be shared with the teachers. And the difficulty that arises for the humanist parent is that in our society most parents desire that Christian instruction shall be given in the schools. What, then, can the humanist parent do?

It would be a mistake to ask that the child shall be exempt from attendance at periods of religious instruction as to spotlight the child's nonconformity is needlessly embarrassing. The effects of the anxiety so engendered are quite incalculable and almost certainly bad. To seek this kind of protection is a common mistake of Christian parents, and humanists would be well advised to avoid this error. One would expect Christian parents to prefer that their children would accept their own views of life after considering the alternatives. For humanists it is even more important that their children should accept the humanist view of life after acquaintance with the Christian point of view as presented by Christians themselves.

At adolescence, of course, children need protection against the highly emotional 'missions' to which some try to subject them. They need protection against religious propaganda of the kind that attempts to induce anxiety and a sense of guilt or sin. Against this particular hazard some solid protection is provided through the enjoyment of the natural affections in a cheerful home, and in a home in which value is attached to a sense of humour.

The fact remains that some risks must be taken. Parenthood can never be combined with total freedom from anxiety. Parents bear up with fortitude when their sons are risking their lives on land, at sea, or in the air, fighting a 'righteous war.' They bear up when their sons are risking their lives for fun—in mountaineering, caving, or racing on motor-bikes. They

need, in addition, to be intellectually brave and morally brave. They need to bear up with fortitude when they see their children exposed to propaganda. They need, indeed, to practise a measure of Spartan virtue in exposing their children themselves to situations in which they will encounter erroneous beliefs.

But if the young are to be so exposed they must be given the weapons of self-defence. Much can be done through early training in the art of civilized discussion. When a child is old enough to box he is old enough to be taught not to hit below the belt. When he is old enough to argue he is old enough to be introduced to the principles of rational discussion. He can be taught progressively not to be taken in by mere debating points, and to distinguish real from merely rhetorical questions. He can acquire some skill in pricking frothy bubbles.

The humanist has some solid grounds for confidence. When the relation of parents and children are right the balance is tilted strongly in favour of the influence of the home. The balance in fact is apt to be tilted too strongly in this way and the parents' greatest problem may be to foster independence of judgment.

Humanist education requires a long-term policy to cover the whole period in which the young must be increasingly exposed to propaganda, counter-propaganda, and counter-counter-propaganda. Religious instruction in the school is the first phase of this exposure, but bias can be corrected by the training provided in the home. Sensible parents who have done their job properly can watch with equanimity, and perhaps with some amusement, the skill with which their children can cope first with the cruder form of propaganda, and later with propaganda of a more insidious kind. They will have done their job properly in providing their children with the weapons of intellectual self-defence and will have taught them how to use them.

CHILDREN WHO WANT RELIGION

Cyril Bibby

THE problems presented to the agnostic parent in an officially Christian country are very real, and perhaps they have no very satisfactory solution. A century ago they were in one sense greater, for the legal and social handicaps of the avowed humanist were considerable. But in another sense things were simpler. When the Church demanded acceptance of the primitive cosmogony of Genesis, when it denied the fact of evolution, when God was presented as a somewhat sophisticated but still essentially man-like tribal deity, no rationalist parent could very well do other than try to deliver his children from the whole bag of tricks. But now that the local vicar is no more likely to believe in Adam and Eve than in hobgoblins, now that the nearest Sunday School may put on a film show to illustrate natural selection and the parson gravely discuss how far and in what sort of sense it might be possible to call Christ divine, now that the word 'God' is often used merely as a conveniently brief word for all that which we cannot understand, the boundaries have become remarkably blurred.

In a way, of course, this is a great victory for humanism. If Christian belief is no longer as precise as it was, perhaps it is no longer quite so unreasonable as it was. Probably many humanists have had my experience, that debate with a 'modernist' clergyman leaves a feeling that I am as near to being a Christian as he is. More than once, indeed, I have been so assured by my opponent, who was at a loss to understand why I was reluctant to accept that title.

And there is the nub of the matter. What is at stake is in many cases not so much minor differences of belief as the whole question of intellectual integrity. It is not that I ought to call myself a Christian, but that many who do so dub themselves

ought not to. And, if one hopes to bring up children with a respect for intellectual integrity, with a determination not to submit to the terrible pressures of the modern world to conformity in externals even in the absence of inner conviction, one must refuse to accept this label even though it has been shorn of so much of its earlier significance.

The first practical test of the agnostic parent is, of course, that of baptism shortly after the birth of his first child. One can understand a reluctance to stand out against the common custom, and even sympathize with a fear that one might be presumptuously cutting off one's child from the accepted formal connection with organized religion, but I am glad that my wife and I had none of our four children christened. At least we know that we did not demean ourselves to make promises which for us would have been dishonest; and, as the children have grown up and inquired why they were not baptized, I think that they have appreciated that honesty.

They have all wished to go with their friends to Sunday School, and we have not discouraged them, but it certainly came as a bit of a shock when the eldest lad at the age of sixteen declared his wish to be baptized. We regret that he does not see things as we do, but we felt that for a lad of that age to present himself in church for a ceremony usually undergone by babies represented a certain moral integrity and courage, and we were glad to accept his invitation to go along with him on that occasion.

I confess that I find the situation a little mystifying. Why is it, I ask myself, that, knowing the disbelief of his parents and yet never having been subjected to pressure from them, he prefers to take this course? Have we, perhaps, in avoiding the risk of forcing our opinions down his throat, left that passage wide open for the opinions of the orthodox? Would we have been wiser to have been more forthright in our expressions of scepticism and more openly critical of the religious instruction which year by year children receive in school? Should we have risked making him feel exceptional, and withdrawn him from such instruction under the conscience clause? I don't know, I can't make up my mind. I merely comfort myself with the thought that, even if his beliefs remain unshaken through his

student years, there are worse things that can happen to a child than becoming a Christian.

In this sort of situation, the rationalist parent does well to remind himself that the essence of rationalism is not opposition to any particular set of beliefs, but to intellectual dishonesty and to the holding of beliefs against the weight of the evidence. I am in no doubt that the weight of the evidence is against Christian belief, but I am bound to recognize that what my son is accepting is very different from what at his age I rejected.

Things like the Biblical miracles, the Virgin Birth, and so on, seem to many young people who call themselves Christians to be entirely marginal and to be rejected if one so wishes. What is left appears to be a rather vague sense of the numinous, a highly generalized belief in some vague deity which was in some way manifest in Jesus of Nazareth—and arguing against it is rather like punching a feather pillow. This is distasteful to one who prefers clear statements of belief and disbelief, but it seems fairly immune from attack.

While our children were young we deliberately refrained from any systematic attempt to combat the Christian mythology which we knew they were soaking in from the society around them. We have never made any secret of our own disbelief, but we have been uncomfortably aware that the determined and knowledgeable adult can always out-argue the young child, and we have recoiled from the somewhat sterile sort of victory which could be envisaged. For, after all, we have asked ourselves, is it any better for a child to disbelieve because his parents are effective debaters than to believe because his neighbours do? People like us, in fact, are at the inevitable disadvantage of the man respecting the Queensberry rules in combat with one who does not hesitate to use every low punch he can get away with.

Once the children are fully matured, and there is no risk that we may be simply out-gunning them, we shall no doubt do our best to make them see the light. Perhaps that will be too late, but I don't see that any other course is open to an agnostic parent who respects the integrity of his children's personalities.

There are, fortunately, other things than religion to be rational about. If one's children develop rational attitudes to the great questions of peace and war, of population and family

planning, of educational and social reform, something has been achieved. If they learn to think honestly about such prejudice-laden matters as sex and race and politics, that is not nothing. And, if it so happens that they enjoy the fellowship and join in the communal worship of a church, that is not—if an agnostic may use the phrase—too heavy a cross for the parent to bear.

EXPERIENCES OF HUMANIST PARENTS

Contributors to this symposium were invited to describe with the utmost frankness how they dealt with a situation that faces all humanist parents. For some there seems hardly any problem, but for others there are painful pressures within and without the family, and the effect on the child of conflict in the adult world is hard to estimate. No advice based on mere theory can compare with the light shed by actual experiences. Because of the highly personal nature of these different accounts some contributors have used pseudonyms.

PARENT AND TEACHER

It is said that the late Cecil B. De Mille never lost his 'innocent' child-like approach to religion, looking upon the Old Testament stories as a revelation of God's word: 'Mighty warriors like Joshua were my heroes. They were like the cowboys and supermen who are heroes to the children today.'

With most of us, this attitude is quickly outgrown, seeming pathetic in an adult. As a humanist parent and teacher, I try to meet the challenge with very young children, who enjoy a good story for its own sake, and do not seek deeper implications. I have no objection to Scripture lessons in the Primary School, since many of the tales are exciting and stimulating to young minds, and of course stories like 'The Prodigal Son' provide sound moral teaching in a harmless way. Nevertheless, one must always point out that it is 'only a story.'

An intelligent child in State or Private School is seldom indoctrinated *at school,* and soon learns to be critical. Seven-year-olds have told me that it was unfair for Jacob to have prospered because of his deceit. Again, when asked why a kind God should permit a disaster such as the eruption of Vesuvius, I reply that such things take place because of the structure of the world, no person being involved. The child gradually works it out for himself that there can be no all-powerful God.

He needs to learn that because we chanced to be born in the west we have the ethics and dogma of Christianity firmly rooted in our heritage. Had we lived farther to the east, we should have had the ideas of Mahomet or Buddha instilled into us. We can learn a great deal from all these 'faiths' regarding ethical conduct, but none is infallible. Moreover, the child must be told that other people whom he meets will think differently in this matter, so he must consider carefully and make up his own mind.

In Secondary Schools most thoughtful teachers, some of them humanists, constantly strive to give children a balanced view. I am not therefore of the opinion that religious instruction in schools does much harm to an intelligent child. It seems to me unwise to withdraw a *young* child from Scripture lessons, for at the junior stage he is a conformist and cannot bear to be different from his fellows.

During twenty years' experience in more than ten Primary and Private Schools I remember the situation taking place once or twice, and the child concerned felt awkward and received a certain amount of prejudice. At the Secondary School the child of humanist parents may wisely contract out, if the teacher is orthodox and unwilling to accept critical discussion. This problem does not arise in junior schools, where teachers are on the whole non-specialists.

It would seem that the attitude in the home is of paramount importance. I have always been grateful to my humanist parents who allowed me to gratify my curiosity by attending church and Sunday School. These soon proved boring and dreary, and were rejected, although I like hymn tunes and play them still. As long as a child is encouraged to confide in his parents, he is not likely to have mental worries before teen-age. Parents must give their sincere answers to all questions, while admitting that many people think otherwise.

A hundred years ago church-going was the accepted rule, and even now, according to the Gallup Poll, 41 per cent still believe in a personal God, and 54 per cent hope for a future life. It is therefore essential for the children of humanists to compare favourably with others in respect of manners and courtesy. Conduct will be according to the example set at home. I think

we should tell our children that, while science develops man's control over Nature, man is a social animal and must learn to control himself, following a suitable moral code for its own sake.

ISA M. PREUSS

CHURCH WAS 'BORING'

OUR family consists of father (public school and ancient university, with the religious instruction that that implies, but with no religious beliefs or practice at home); mother (similar educational background and in addition unorthodox religious beliefs actively practised at home—theosophical, liberal catholic); two boys in Primary School who were not baptized and received no religious instruction from their parents.

We have not gone out of our way to have the children treated differently from their fellows, and they attend prayers in school, both finding it boring to do so. One boy belongs to a Wolf Cub pack which we thought would provide certain benefits for him. It is attached to a Methodist chapel, and we made it clear from the start that we had no religious beliefs. We have not, however, prevented our son from attending church parades; on the contrary, we have suggested to him that he should go to please the officers of the pack, who after all do a lot to please him.

Happily, he finds this attendance extremely dull. Occasionally both children have asked why we don't go to church, and we have explained that some people believe that it is a good thing to pray to someone whom they call God, but that we don't believe that there is such a person, so of course we don't go to church. They have not pressed the point, apart from fleeting wishes to go to the Sunday School or to 'be a choir boy.'

Early in his school life, one of the boys asked, 'Is God real or pretend?' I replied that we thought he was 'pretend,' and that most of our friends thought so too. But, I added, his teachers probably thought that God was real and would certainly tell him so. When he grew up he could decide himself what he thought. 'Shall I tell you what I think now?' said he, 'I think *both*.'

We take comfort from the sayings of many Churchmen that unless there is religion in the home their work is in vain.

We encourage the children to get their sights straight with the help of books and television programmes on how the world came into existence and how life has developed over millions of years. We earnestly wish, incidentally, that some general science were taught in the junior school, for there is no doubt that the children at this age are very ready for it.

We have also read Bible stories with them. Actually we did this before they went to school in order to minimize the impact of the religious propaganda upon them, particularly at Christmas time. We made the point that Jesus was a good man, and that people ever since have tried to live up to the example he set, and that was a good thing to do because good people at all times have been an example to others. Sometimes we have made fumbling attempts to explain that what some people call God can usefully be thought of as the best that man can try to be. This is a bit above their heads at present.

To implant moral rules has not been easy, and one of us at least has sometimes in times of crisis sighed for the supreme sanction of 'God will be angry'! On the best method of inculcating moral principles the parents do not see altogether as one —one of us considers that children as young as ours need the security of firm rules—'this' and 'this' must be done because it is the rule. The other tries to explain why certain things should be done—because we should be kind to other people if we want to be treated kindly ourselves, and so on. Mainly we rely on example—not ourselves—but by praising kind, generous, tolerant people and criticizing cruel, selfish, and arrogant ones.

A. C. and M. R. KETTLE

MY FOUR CHILDREN

ALL four of my children knew from their fourth Christmas that it was the celebration of the birth of Christ and from their fourth Easter that Good Friday celebrated his crucifixion and Easter his supposed resurrection. They also knew during their fourth year that some people believed in a creator God,

who was like Christ, and that at school there would be prayers to God and Christ. This all seemed inevitable and desirable in our society, both because at the age of four they heard of these things from other children, and because at five they would find the Christian religion acquiesced in at the school by the staff and fellow pupils.

They also knew people went to church. Simultaneously they all came to know that their parents did not believe in a Creator God or that Christ was God made man. They were told that we could learn more and more about how the world had developed, but not why it existed or was as it was, and that though there is no God to tell us what we should do we must try and find out how we can all live best together on earth.

Now I must deal with the reactions of each child separately in the years between four and six. My experience is that from four to six all my children were extremely sensitive to religious ideas and to the world they were discovering. In varying degrees they were more reflective and emotionally involved than between six and fourteen or sixteen. It was therefore impossible to leave religion and the conflict of views till later unless one actively misrepresented one's own basic assumptions and feelings about life.

John, who has become a scientist of wide interests, harped all through his fourth summer upon the ultimate cause of things being as they are, and clearly wanted the Creator God as answer to his own questioning. No account of processes met his need.

He also wanted to know why flowers died. Then his grandmother died and I took a purely naturalistic view of death, but said he knew very well she had not been just her body which was buried as we buried birds which we found dead. He kept asking where she was having her meals, and clearly could not conceive her non-existence. Then he heard the rhyme about Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and the angels round my bed. He seized upon the line about the 'Two to carry me when I'm dead,' and I had to say that the angels did carry us when we died just as I carried the babies. After that he never asked another question about what happens after death but was quite radiant when his grandfather died shortly afterwards.

When, before his sixth Easter, I read him the story of the crucifixion he was not apparently concerned about the truth of the resurrection, but was haunted for months by the question, 'Why did they kill such a good man!'

Years later he said I should not have read it to him as it was too devastating. This is particularly interesting as he was an adventurous boy who easily became absorbed and forgot other people.

His younger brother later had the same reaction even more pronouncedly and prolongedly, but the two girls, who were always kind and thoughtful and responsible about other people, simply paid no attention to the story of the crucifixion. It was not real.

Betty was never one to reveal what thoughts she had, but she would have liked to believe in the loving God. Later she suffered more than the others from our unconventionality though from eleven to sixteen she was educated in private day schools where religion was not part of school. She did not seem to be interested in religion and did not have apparently to face any conflict till seventeen, but then she longed to believe in God and worried that she could not until she found faith through a vicar. But this is leaping ahead.

Charles seemed less speculative than John and less imaginative about God, but I have told how he worried about the crucifixion for a whole year. He was never disturbed over the death of flowers and was too young when his grandparents died so the problem of death never touched him. But when he was five and a half he was taught by an eager Christian, and then his eyes glowed when he told me of God, and he wanted to say his prayers and hoped to return to God when he died. This phase soon passed.

Dorothy also responded with glowing eyes to the thought of God. Only later I found out that though I had never thought her naughty and rarely lost my temper with her yet from a very early age she used to feel guilty and longed to be forgiven by God, and did in fact pray to him, which did bring relief to her conscience. She had standards of kindness and generosity as well as fairness which from very early put me to shame, and

these high standards must have tormented her conscience with little help from outside authority.

Now, before passing on to adolescent experience, I want to say very firmly that I never found moral education a problem for lack of supernatural authority or example. All four children accepted as self-evident that other people had feelings and claims, and that some order was necessary for family and social life. This does not mean they were never selfish or disorderly. My own experience suggests that Christianity is not needed as a prop to morality. What may have some therapeutic value is the idea of a God who will forgive you in the secret places of your soul and who seems to be an ever-present source of grace and strength.

I discovered later that there was a craving for the ideal person in the girls. The sensitive and good sometimes crave the existence of the perfect being. It is not that he is needed to make the bad good.

At thirteen and a half John went from a day prep school, at which religion had made no impression on him, to Rugby, where the impact of chapel services and good preachers, rather than divinity lessons, was immense. For several years he felt he was the only boy who thought about it and did not just take it for granted. He wished for support from his parents in thinking out his position. But the strain was not excessive and as the other boys grew older he found an occasional one who thought. He did not mind being the only boy not to be confirmed on other grounds than being Presbyterian, and he emerged having thought out his own humanist position and able to defend it to Army officers and others.

Charles also went to Rugby but remained unperturbed. There was no emotional appeal, and he thought Christianity absurd intellectually all through. He considered that he had only to think of his sister Dorothy to see how foolish was any claim to moral superiority by Christians.

Dorothy herself went to a Grammar School where there was one atheist who spoke up in Scripture lessons. Being shy herself and not so quick in argument, she simply let it be known that she, too, was not a Christian.

After she was sixteen she began to try and think it all out

and did not feel the strong desire to believe in a perfect being who loved and forgave. She has certainly felt the barrenness of intellectual humanism without anything put forward in the way of moving human stories of goodness and courage. She likes going to church services though she is still a humanist.

I cannot help feeling that there are positive things craved by young people which humanists have not provided though they could do so on a humanist basis. HUMANIST MOTHER

WERE WE MISTAKEN?

WE have two sons, now aged nineteen and twenty-three, and their attitudes to religion are quite different. Our own background is agnostic and humanist. Our sons were not baptized, and we did not object to the religious lessons at school. On Sundays we usually took them out for rambles in the country.

We seldom discussed religion at home, and I do not remember that, when young, they asked questions about it. Our positive moral teaching was confined to questions of behaviour which arise naturally as children grow up.

Our eldest boy, when about ten, through joining games of cricket in the village which were run by an evangelist sect, began to attend their Sunday School. Later, at the Grammar School, he came in touch with other evangelists and 'fundamentalists' in the school 'Christian Union,' which in fact they controlled. Some friends who ran with him in the cross-country team also belonged to a sect similar to the one in our village, and he later attended their summer camps. He has become strongly attached to the Evangelist movement, works for them at university level, and locally helps to run their youth club and Sunday School.

We now think that we made a mistake in not finding out more about the teaching of these organizations at an earlier stage, and endeavouring to combat their influence. We thought our son would eventually outgrow such beliefs. Of course, he may yet do so, but we thought it would happen much sooner. We believed in Neill's ideas of freedom of development for children, but ignored the fact that many organizations and in-

dividuals do not share this belief, and seek to convert children at an early age, often by indirect methods such as games, camps, films, etc.

Our younger son, who went to the same schools as his brother, did not react in the same way. He attended the local evangelist Sunday School for a short while, but disliked the atmosphere and left. In his case we also made an effort to counteract their influence and dissuade him from becoming connected with them. He had also become interested in astronomy and elementary science and therefore developed a more positive view of the world than his brother, who had different interests. He was also more forward in discussing general questions of a religious and scientific nature.

However, I also think that the difference in the development of our two boys may also be due to factors of a psychological and sociological nature. Did the war, air raids, and evacuation give the older boy a feeling of insecurity? Has he, for some reason, reacted against his parents' outlook (though this is only true in religious matters)? He is somewhat shy and introverted, and does not readily express his emotions. In adolescence he was probably rather lonely. Has he therefore a temperament which responds more readily to religious teaching, particularly of the emotional evangelist type? On the other hand, participation in these organizations has given him much more confidence in dealing with situations and with people.

Our younger son, who went to the same schools as his brother, openly; he is rather individualistic and has a love of personal freedom. From an early age he had a deep love of the countryside, leading to pantheistic feelings in later years; he practised music and painting and read poetry; his range of general reading is wide. Does this mean he did not need to turn to Christianity to satisfy his emotional needs? Our elder son has had to specialize in architecture for many years, and I think that if he had had a wider range of reading in literature and history he would not in adolescence have continued to remain in a narrow Christian sect.

I think that adolescents, in particular, need some view of life which evokes hope and enthusiasm and harnesses their energies and devotion. My wife and I, when young, turned away from

orthodox religion and found inspiration in the socialist movement, and in the general trend to freedom and experiment in literature and art, psychology, sex, and human values which were at that time associated with it. Today, by contrast, there is no movement of this nature that young people can turn to—hence feelings of apathy or nihilism, or the seeking of a refuge in old religious dogmas. The whole question of the religious development of children and adolescents is complex, and many of the factors are outside the control of individual parents.

R. T.

WORRIES ABOUT SEX

I WAS brought up in a Christian home, but in my mother's family there was a good deal of unorthodox thinking and I broke away from the Church without greatly upsetting the family. My husband was brought up in a strongly religious home, but by the time he was sixteen he had lost both his parents so that his later religious views did not closely concern anyone else.

It seemed better to my husband and me to bring our child up without religion from the beginning, so in her pre-school years she made no contact with religion at all. Difficulties might have arisen when she went to school but they did not. We did not, however, take advantage of the right of withdrawal from religious instruction because to us it seemed more important that our daughter should not be made to feel any different from other children than was absolutely unavoidable. Religious instruction at Primary School largely takes the form of Bible stories, and there seems no reason for debarring a child from these any more than for debarring her from the tales of Greek and Norse mythology. Indeed, from later experiences I think she did not learn enough about a 'mythology' that is after all the background of our cultural heritage because some extraordinary gaps in her knowledge have been revealed at times.

The first question that arose, and the first time that religion was discussed at all, was when our daughter was about six years old and she wanted to know why she had not been christened and why we had not had a 'white wedding' like other parents

—photographs in the sitting-rooms of school friends and questions from them made her bring this matter up. We explained as simply as we could how most people in this country believed there was a God in heaven who had made this world and sent his son Jesus Christ to teach people how they should behave. But, we pointed out, no one actually *knew* this God existed; some people believed in other gods as the ancient Greeks had done, some people did not think there was any God at all, and some people, like us, thought there were so many different ideas about how the world was made that at present it was impossible to know what was true. As she grew older, we told her, she would hear some of these different ideas and perhaps she would make up her mind in a different way from us. She accepted this quite happily.

At about the age of eight, Mary began to want to go to church like some of her friends did. I took her once or twice but her interest did not last for long except that she always liked to go to the annual carol service. When she was eleven we moved to a different neighbourhood and she went to the local Grammar School. Church-going here was a much more wide-spread social habit than where we had lived before, but perhaps Mary was fortunate in that the parents of one of her special friends were definitely non-Church people and the parents of the other, although devout practising Christians, were very broadminded in their outlook and had many non-Christian friends.

From late Primary School age, Mary was prepared to explain and argue our religious position, as she understood it, with anyone who queried it—she was never ashamed or embarrassed by our unorthodox views. In her later years at the Grammar School the periods of religious instruction were frequently given over to discussion of comparative religion and ethical questions, and in these she took a great interest. Religious discussion was encouraged and she was never made by the staff to feel there was anything reprehensible in the point of view she took.

I was struck by the fact that, even at the adolescent stage, when many children begin to question their parents' faith, there were few among the boys and girls here who showed any signs of doing so. On the other hand, neither was Mary led by their

arguments to question our lack of faith. There was a brief period in adolescence when she went to church because of the social amenities there. We made no objection to this and it was as short-lived as her period of church-going in childhood.

One result of this way of upbringing appears to have been to make our daughter very interested in religious and philosophical questions in a detached, rather scientific way. There have been times when she has told me that she wished she had been brought up as a Christian because her Christian friends seemed to have something she lacked, but she was too deeply imbued with the agnostic point of view ever to be able to accept their faith. She believed they were deluded but thought they were happier because of their delusions.

Another result has been to make her very independent in mind and unafraid of expressing her opinions, but this could be more the result of temperament than upbringing, as her father is like that. Another child might have reacted to such an upbringing by feeling cut off from her contemporaries and retiring into her shell.

In addition to bringing up our daughter without any religious faith we have also brought her up with very little ethical or 'moral' training except what was necessary in childhood to enable her to fit into social life, and what she may have learned by example rather than precept. Questions of sex I have discussed freely with her, and between the ages of seventeen and eighteen she used to be rather shocked at the utilitarian way I looked at problems of sexual morality. Whether her views were influenced by those of her Christian friends or whether they were the result of a romantic idealism natural at this age, it would be impossible to say. Now, at nineteen, she is beginning to look at these problems more from my point of view, but definitely the lack of Christian 'principles' has not led her to lead a promiscuous sex life.

This is a question which I think worries parents who wish to bring their children up without religion and it is one I have discussed with Mary. I think her own conduct may be more the result of temperament than of the practical considerations involved in sex questions that I have explained to her, but from her own observations she thinks that the boys and girls who go

most 'hay-wire' sexually in adolescence and early youth are often those who have been brought up with the strictest ideas of the principles inculcated by religion and by social propriety. It would seem that at this age religious 'principles,' either accepted or rejected, only serve to obscure the practical issues involved.

I have no regrets at all for having brought my daughter up in this way. She seems to me a far more secure, self-assured person than I was at her age, unafraid of ridicule and keenly critical in all arguments, not only those about religion. Girls, boys, and adults find her an intelligent and stimulating companion and she has not suffered socially in any way from her unorthodox upbringing. In character she is no saint, but she is friendly, co-operative, and has, in the last few years, developed a sense of responsibility for anything she undertakes. Perhaps she is not charitable in the Christian sense—she expects other people to be as capable of standing on their own feet as she is and is rather scornful of the sympathy I extend to lame dogs. But one does find Christians with this fault, and intolerance is a natural fault in youth. CLERGYMAN'S GRAND-DAUGHTER

UNHAPPY EPISODE

My wife and I find that our chief difficulty in bringing up four children without religion is in trying to decide when and how far social pressure towards orthodoxy is to be resisted. We have proceeded largely by trial and error, always conscious that we must not let the *child* suffer for *our* convictions.

Baptism was out from the very start. (For a humanist to have his child baptized seems like capitulating before the battle has even begun—and it *is* a battle, unfortunately.) Grandparents lived far enough away to be unable to express more than silent (though palpable!) disapproval, apart from which no other drawbacks or difficulties have been encountered. Nor has non-attendance at church resulted in any complications: regular church-going is, after all, a minority occupation at the moment.

Most serious has been the conflict arising out of religious instruction at school. My wife—a less aggressive unbeliever

than me—stressed the importance of not emphasizing our son's 'difference' at an impressionable age, and so he was allowed to attend Scripture classes. (I should explain that most of our experience related to our eldest boy, now aged nine and a half; the other three children are too young for many problems to have presented themselves so far.) All seemed to be going well and we assumed that on a simple Bible-story level no harm was being done; until one day the boy repeated his teacher's edict that people who did not believe in God were wicked.

Unwisely, I reacted violently to this remark: perhaps I was a little on edge at the time, but my anger and disgust at seeing a child thus turned against his parents was heightened when I contrasted the intellectual arrogance and dishonesty of such a remark with the scrupulous manner in which we had answered all questions as factually and impartially as possible, without in any way 'pushing' humanism, other than to indicate its existence and the fact that not everyone believed in God or Christianity.

This was the beginning of a crisis which lasted for some weeks, and I was appalled to see how far indoctrination had gone. The boy became aggressive in his insistence that God *did* exist, pointedly and openly read the Bible far more than hitherto, and cried or went into tantrums if I so much as tried to point out, as gently as possible, that there were two sides to the question and that no one could be *sure*.

Though we have tried in the two years or so since the incident to minimize its effects and to maintain a calm impartiality, it was, and remains in retrospect, an unpleasant episode. Yet surely, so long as one section of opinion arrogates to itself the right to propagate its own doctrines in schools, to the exclusion of others, with no redress save 'contracting out,' such conflicts are always possible. What is needed is an end to the iniquitous system whereby a vested interest can present its own side of a controversial question as unquestionable truth, and this to small children too young to question the beliefs given them by adults.

R. R. JOHNSON

TURNING TO GOD

I WAS brought up in a half-hearted Church of England fashion and my husband very strictly in the Church of Scotland—blinds down on Sunday, etc. We have two children, a girl born in 1933 and a boy in 1937. They were not baptized. At their first small school I made sure that the religious teaching was not overdone; at later schools they took what came. We answered all their questions with the truth as we saw it. I told them that I thought Christ was a very good man, but I didn't believe that he was the Son of God; in fact, I didn't believe in God, but lots of people did and everybody had a right to think as they pleased. They accepted this and I noticed no confusion at all.

All kinds of questions, of course, were asked, and were answered mostly by my husband in a simple scientific way. I honestly don't ever remember his not satisfying them; he took endless pains, often looking things up and reading out. We didn't thrust anything at them, but *waited* for the questions, which is safer, as children only ask when they are ready to know.

They lost nothing, as far as could be seen, by being excluded from the social amenities of the Church. It was their own choice, rather. My daughter, a sociable child, joined the Brownies and the boy the Cubs; to my annoyance they were badgered to go to church, so they went—twice. My daughter had to be brought home as the incense made her sick. My son, always interested in history, said the preacher hadn't got his facts right.

It sounds horribly precocious, but it was said quite humbly. My son left the Cubs, but my daughter, skipping church, continued in the Brownies. The vicar called to see why she didn't attend church. In fairness we said we were non-believers, but in no way stopped Jinnie from church. If he didn't want her in the Brownies, he must say so. 'That is quite all right,' he answered. 'We have all sorts, we even have a Jew.'

He talked nicely down to us, and even threw in a 'bloody' or two to show how broad-minded he was; and left promising to come back and talk to us. He never came. Jinnie tries every-

thing once; she even went to Sunday school with a small boy friend who urged her to go, but she got fed up with the children who teased her and her friend about being sweethearts, so she left that, and no one came to see where she was! I have asked them often if ever they felt out of step with the other children and always they have said 'No.'

They are both adults now. My son lately had leanings towards religion. He believes in God, and for a while went to a Union Church, but gave it up. When I asked why, he said: 'To go to church is impossible. I can't live up to that standard, and it's no good going to church unless one can.'

My daughter was married in church, a bit of a blow to father, but we got him there. I think she believes in an after-life.

You may feel this is a sad ending to the story, but we don't think so. When we had the children we thought the best things in life are honesty and kindness, and on these two things we concentrated. We were not anti-religious (because so many people need a prop) and we were quite determined we would bring them up honestly and decently on their own two feet. Whatever other faults they may have, they are completely honest and kind in thought and action. If they like to believe in God now, I don't really mind. Because of their Godless childhood, they will live decently for the sake of their fellows, not to gain divine favours.

I must just add that on being married in church my daughter refused to let them baptize her, and got away with it. And quite lately she has thanked us for bringing her up with an uncluttered mind.

OLIVIA STEWART

FREEDOM TO CHOOSE

I HAVE not found in my experience any real problems regarding the question of religion as my children have grown up. Partly, perhaps, because I believe that children should be allowed to decide for themselves, when they reach a suitable age, what they believe.

If a mutual respect has been fostered in the relationship on other matters, children will naturally wish to discuss religion with their parents, which is the opportunity for us to present

our views and ideas, and help and guide them where possible. As I was brought up in a religious background myself I found the question of christening a tricky one. But after some discussion my husband and I decided to have our children christened because we felt they might be very glad later and were not in a position to decide for themselves now.

In our family both sides of the question have been realized. Our son, aged nineteen, finds no appeal in religion at all, and it hasn't mattered to him one wit whether he was christened or not. But my young daughter, thirteen years old, is in the first stages of thinking for herself and is very glad.

We did not withdraw them from school instruction as we felt it only fair that they should hear all sides to enable them to form a balanced opinion on the subject. Neither did we wish them to feel 'different,' which I do not think is necessary at all.

My daughter asked, when younger, 'Why don't we go to church?' and that being a perfect opportunity, I told her our reasons as far as I felt she could understand them.

My son has never questioned it. However, he knows our feelings as we have had some interesting discussions on the subject since he has become a little more mature. I do feel strongly that this is entirely a personal thing, which each one must decide for himself through experience. Therefore I would never send a small child to church or Sunday School to repeat words he did not understand, making religion a mere habit. I would try to gain his confidence so that he would talk freely and at an appropriate age read informative books by people who have taken the trouble to think deeply about the subject.

If the opinions of each member of the family are respected, whatever they may be, it is easily possible to live in harmony and happiness, as in our case, with a girl who is most interested and inquiring about religion and its origin and meaning, and with a young man who thinks it is worn out and doesn't hold water anyway.

It is all bound up with that most precious thing—freedom. Freedom to think, and talk and read and listen, and from these decide upon your own opinions, which will undoubtedly change as you grow older, but all make up that most valuable thing—experience.

FREDA EMBRY

WITHDRAWAL UNWISE

BROUGHT up by Nonconformist parents, I became puzzled and then disillusioned by their inability to give satisfactory answers to my questions on God and religion. I was thus thrown inwards upon myself and went through the usual stages of doubt and confusion before finally facing squarely the fact that I had no Christian faith. The eventual realisation through contact with the RPA that many felt as I did was a very great relief and blessing.

My wife was brought up a firm Anglican, but has since modified her views considerably, while being unable fully to embrace humanism.

In these circumstances she has largely left to me the answering of questions on religion from our four children (aged nine to sixteen), who partly for conventional and partly for family reasons were baptized.

They have always received RI at school because we feel strongly that they would have suffered psychologically (and at some schools materially) had we taken advantage of the right of withdrawal. In any case, most of the RI appears to have consisted of Biblical history and was therefore relatively innocuous from our point of view. Nevertheless, school prayers and the conversation of other children, many of whom attended Sunday School, have somewhat confused our children and have led them to ask questions and have sometimes made them wish themselves to attend both church and Sunday School.

The prospect of attending a 'Pathfinders' summer camp was an added inducement to the girls. (In retrospect, it nearly killed their wish . . . my younger daughter summed up her experience of the camp as 'too much praying'). We never put the smallest obstacle in the way of their attending both church and Sunday School (apart from not attending ourselves), and soon the novelty of the experience wore off and neither girl now attends or shows any real desire to do so. The boys have never attended either church or Sunday School and have evinced no interest in either.

One gathers that the act of worship at the boys' schools and the RI are perfunctory and make little impact. They have

always had friends who show the same absence of interest and they have, I believe, no sense of being excluded from the social amenities of church. On the other hand, many of our daughters' friends regularly worship as do their families (largely, I think, because of the type of school they attend) and they have sometimes felt such a loss.

I have always tried to answer their questions fairly and objectively, giving both humanist and Christian viewpoints (but dissociating morals from religion), and they now thank me for having done so. On one principle, however, there has been no compromise—namely, that they should always be critical, accepting the uncorroborated views of no one, including myself, but drawing their own conclusions from the facts they gather from their own experience.

In this way I hope they will not suffer adolescent reactions against my views, but will develop into critically-minded, mature adults and humanists.

H. J. MINERS

NEEDLESS FEARS

I HAVE two sons, now aged thirteen and fifteen years. I was very perturbed as to how the religious aspect of their upbringing could be achieved in a manner which would leave them free to make up their own minds about it later in life, when I could ask myself, 'Have I done well by them? Can they unerringly choose the right action? Will they become men who will be able to go through life retaining their own self-respect as well as that of their friends?'

The elder boy only was baptized due to family pressure, which I regret. They received religious instruction in both Sunday and day schools, as I felt it would be most unfair to force my children to be different from their fellows without understanding what it was all about. Also they had to learn the orthodox presentation of religion to enable them to see both sides.

Sunday School ended abruptly for them when the younger boy asked his teacher how God, Christ and Jesus were supposed to be one and the same person yet they were taught Jesus was

the Son of God. He came home crying with exasperation as he had been laughed at, and asked me to explain.

I explained that as I saw it a very great and good prophet, named Jesus Christ, had lived some 2,000 years ago and had compiled a moral code or set of rules for people to live by to make them good neighbours. Whether he was divine was another matter. Before and since his time many great men had lived, but Jesus was certainly the founder of Christianity. God may only be a figment in the imagination of people who cannot bear to think that death is an end—not a beginning.

I came from a Christian home and voluntarily went regularly to church till I started to think for myself and realized that apart from the social side and the music religion was not for me.

My sons miss nothing of this as they play golf, tennis, badminton, and are keen swimmers. I believe athletics can do much to develop a healthy honourable mind in a healthy body.

We have many discussions together on every subject imaginable, and always I have tried to present two sides to every question, which they then have to work out for themselves.

We are a closely-knit family and I am happy to say that my elder son, who is now an adolescent, has become the youth I hoped for—clean-living and clear-thinking; therefore I feel I have done the right thing. The younger boy is following in his brother's footsteps and I have no fears now. Our motto is, 'Be true to yourself.'

BEATRICE H. BAIKIE

SOCIAL PRESSURES

My first reaction on being asked about the difficulties experienced in bringing up children without religion was to say there are none. On reflection, this is not quite true, but, to the children and to my wife and me, they have seemed relatively unimportant.

Most members of our families (not all—my father was an agnostic) were either strong Church people or felt the Church had to participate in the rites of baptism, etc. When I made the suggestion that our first daughter should not be christened,

it became evident that this would cause deep hurt to many (and my wife was not immune at that time) or even estrangements, so I agreed to the ceremony. A nice moral problem which, I confess, never worried me in the least!

Our second daughter was also baptised. Family pressures were not then so strong, but my wife feared she might later think we had 'failed' her, so I had the ceremony performed by a padre who understood my position and adapted the service accordingly.

The third girl was not baptized. Family considerations had ceased to matter, and my wife's attitude was by then fairly well in accord with mine.

I have never seriously considered withdrawing my children from religious instruction at school. My own experience—and this is confirmed by my childrens'—is that youngsters do not 'want to be different.' Nor did I discourage them from attending Sunday School. They have gone from time to time with their friends, but it has never lasted long. I gather that it is dull, that 'prayers and talks' are accompanied by 'sweets and giggling' and that few would continue to go without parental pressure or the carrot of parties, etc.

There has never been much curiosity about religion as such. Discussion tended to arise from other questions: 'Why don't you make us go to Sunday School like the others?' or, later: 'Why are you a humanist and what is it?' The problem for children is not, in my experience, one of personal belief, but of not wanting to be different from their friends. I explained, as simply as I could, how I could not accept the Bible story as true; that most people in this and some other countries still accepted the Christian religion as true in some form or other; and that they would eventually have to decide the question for themselves. They accepted this quite happily.

Two of my daughters—the oldest and the youngest (sixteen and twelve)—believe that they were never affected in their actions by what the Bible said was right and wrong. They believe the distinction between right and wrong came 'naturally.' The other daughter (she is the most volatile, very much concerned about 'what people will think,' and of slightly lower intelligence) believes she was so influenced at one time but not

now. She 'feels there is a God,' and the problem, such as it is, seems most evident in her case.

The oldest girl's beliefs are much in accord with my own, and the youngest takes an agnostic position: 'There might be a God, but she doubts it': 'The question doesn't worry her; it's something to think about.'

To sum up: my experience is that what problem there is derives mainly from social pressures, and that children brought up without religion in the home are saved the kind of worries about 'God's punishments' which I went through as a child, and learn to behave decently without that priggish attitude which I recall.

TOM FYFE

WHEN TO COMPROMISE

I WAS fortunate in having a father who was a rationalist, and thus was encouraged to think things out for myself. My mother was more orthodox and she succeeded eventually in having me baptized in the Anglican church, but not until I was ten years old. Later her beliefs were shattered by the carnage of the 1914 war, and then I was completely free to think as I liked; but this freedom was based on the sound moral unbringing which my parents had given me. So at the commencement of this letter I want to stress that the influence of the home is of the greatest importance. But the pressure of convention is enormous.

In due course I became the father of two girls and had to make decisions. My children were brought up on the two virtues stressed by Bertrand Russell—kindness and veracity. They have found that sincere belief in these two things is sufficient not only to lead full and happy lives but to help them to undermine the stupider social conventions. One must not oversimplify, however, as modern life is very complicated, with all kinds of interests pulling in different directions. Provided that basic principles of belief and behaviour are insisted upon, it is not weakness sometimes to compromise on lesser things, and by so doing the adolescent child is saved a good deal of embarrassment.

To illustrate what I mean, I should mention that I gave way

to family pressure on the question of baptism, and I yielded to the school's expectation that my children should attend daily prayers (Anglican again). Orthodox Scripture was taught, and my children soon began to ask questions on creation, goodness, and Christian dogma. But dogma has a way of defeating itself.

Thinking for themselves, my girls could see that Nature was cruel, just as they were repelled by dogma with its insistence on blood sacrifice. A word from me here and there proved sufficient. I mentioned St. Augustine's dilemma, and in reply to a question on salvation I could not resist quoting Shaw, to the effect that the doctrine of the atonement was no more than 'an insane vengeance bought off by a trumpery expiation.'

The pressure exerted by social custom is tremendous. For example, how many young girls can resist the verbal and pictorial propaganda in the women's weekly magazines? My elder daughter was married in an Anglican church. But for many young people, church is like a dentist's surgery—a place to be visited very seldom and when occasion demands.

Children prefer a simple moral code to a complicated myth, and, if given a sound upbringing, will reject orthodoxy as soon as they can think for themselves. I have watched the maturing of their characters with interest, and, if I may be permitted to say so, with satisfaction.

F. G. COCKMAN

MY HUMANIST UPBRINGING

AT twenty-eight I have very little memory of 'moral training' as a child. I am sure that this is not due to poor memory but to the simple common-sense nature of humanist morality. Besides, my parents were permissive—if over-protective—and I was usually happy to do as they wanted. There were occasional spanks from my mother when I was very young, but otherwise we had no punishment, though sharp words from my father would make me feel very guilty and ashamed.

I must have been aware very early—certainly by the time I started kindergarten at five—that other people had other religions. As far as I was concerned, I was a Jew by race but not by religion. Some of my relatives, and some kindergarten

friends, were more or less 'orthodox,' which meant that they had to walk anywhere they wanted to go on Saturdays, and probably had to go to synagogue; some didn't eat pork, and there seemed to be lots of other restrictions which I couldn't see the point of. But these children did manage to miss a lot of days at school.

Then there were Christians—they weren't Jews, and they usually had fair skin and fair hair, which was very nice. Some of them went to church or Sunday School, and had as boring a Sunday as some of my orthodox friends' Saturday. But Sunday was the more natural day to do nothing on, as shops were shut, and there was always a general holiday air on that day, more than on Saturdays. I mixed freely of course with Christians and 'orthodox.'

1938 came and anti-Semitic scribblings on the walls increased in size and number. Then came 1939 (I was nearly nine), and I was sent by my parents as an 'evacuee' to a small town not far from London. From the first, our foster-mother made it clear that she didn't like Jews (I never understood why she had us). We had crucified her Christ. My personal disclaimer did not help to establish innocence. My non-belief in God mattered little to her.

Mrs. B. scared my older brother and me. We never knew what to expect, and I was often so frightened that I would tell lies to save getting into trouble. This was dreadful—I would not have done it at home, but then the need would not have arisen there. Besides, owning up honestly lessened the degree of censure at home, but not here.

The motto of my school might have been 'Competition.' The ethic was to beat the others, and to see your own name at the top of the list on the classroom door. Any growing social feelings were stifled by the competitive spirit, and in my case exacerbated by Mrs. B's refusal to let us go to the other boys' homes. I think that if we had been encouraged to think of education as a co-operative, not a competitive, enterprise, I might have learnt much earlier than I did to consider others' views and hence to estimate them more realistically; and also to see the place of the social in relation to the individual good. My next school encouraged us to help one another, but this was

always regarded as 'cheating,' so that 'unco-operative' was always written on my reports.

Back home in 1941 I was very glad to be in our happy home atmosphere. My father gave me little talks which must have included morals and sex, but the former I do not remember and the latter I did not understand. Although I did not really believe in a God, I did pray sometimes when bombers came over and the guns boomed.

I began at a modern semi-public school in 1944, and at this time was steeped in old mythologies. With these fitted well my father's talks to me on religion. He would expound Christianity to me, and it did sound pretty convincing. I asked him if he believed in it, and he said he did not, but that that should not affect my opinion. Of course it did! We seldom discussed orthodox Judaism, as that was so obviously 'stupid.' At school I sang hymns with the rest (except for a small minority of orthodox Jews), but of course did not believe in the words. Most of us didn't. I do not recall any arguments about religion, because politics were the important thing. It was 1945!

I started my first job in 1947. Although I still considered political differences of opinion more important, I enjoyed arguments about religion when opportunity presented. In the office I soon fell into the normal petty dishonesties which most of us indulge—which included lengthening the lunch-hour by altering the clock. I learnt a more down-to-earth way of life from an Irish boy a couple of years younger than me, and willingly exchanged some moral scruples for greater fellow-feeling.

In 1949 I was called up, and wrote 'Atheist' in my paybook. The RAF was a tremendous shock. Many of the chaps had only three interests—comics, lavatories, and sex; but when I had settled in a small permanent unit I found most of the others much more reasonable, though with a very different attitude to life than mine—they were mostly opportunistic in sexual relations, philistines as regards the arts, and more concerned with success than with the quality of their lives. By the time I was demobbed (after nearly two years in the unit) I really wondered though if they were not right and I wrong: all I knew was that I felt at home with people of my ideas. I never discussed this problem with my parents or with friends outside the forces,

probably because I should have felt ashamed at suggesting that the others' attitude was even worth considering.

After demob, when I went to work in my father's business, I joined a humanist society, and this helped me to clarify my ideas. Later, I came to think that my business activities were un-humanist, and went to university to study social science. In the humanist society I became great friends with a girl who professed 'Christian Humanism.' Until then the only thing that brought me towards Christianity was hearing Bach's 'St. Matthew Passion,' but now I was hearing a very emotional type of Christianity through which I would be able to express my feelings (which at the time were very intense!), and I was nearly converted. I even had a phase, of a few days, of a semi-mystical pantheism, but finally decided that the whole thing was weakness—not, as she maintained, strength. When at University a couple of years later I became friends with a Catholic girl, I was better able to hold my own.

The lack of emotion in humanism remained even then a disappointment to me. I tended to associate Christianity with emotion (especially as the two friends I have mentioned manifestly possessed both!), and wondered whether humanism was not lacking something vital and essential. Now, however, I realize—not without a tinge of regret—that emotions belong only to personal relationships and artistic expression, whereas a philosophy of life—as distinct from actual living—must be formulated in intellectual terms. G. JULIAN

SEEDS OF LIFE

The Story of Sex in Nature —
From the Amœba to Man

by JOHN LANGDON-DAVIES

Describes vividly the diverse ways in which living beings, from the amoeba to man, reproduce themselves. They are all here: the alga, malaria germ, snail, onion, orchid, termite, earthworm, robin, man himself.

This book is the story of nature's great experiment: from the fission of the first cell through all other forms of multiplication: vegetative growth, as in the potato; hermaphroditism, as in the snail; fertilization 'by remote control', as in the salmon — to the final development, the joining of two mammalian individuals in sexual union.

John Langdon-Davies has written a book of exact and interesting knowledge, illuminated by a sense of wonder at the beauty and complexity of living forms and of the intricate mechanisms that bring them into being.

'Only too often an account of sex in nature is mechanical and very superficial. And in such cases I think it can do more harm than good. But the book from which I have already quoted is excellent. From end to end it is full of the true reverence. A sheer boundless and exuberant wonder at all that scientists have found by studying animals living their own lives instead of preserved as pickled specimens in laboratory jars. . . . Read this excellent book.' — *Family Doctor.*

12s 6d net

C. A. WATTS & CO. LTD.
40 DRURY LANE, LONDON, WC2

Rationalist Press Association Ltd

President: THE EARL RUSSELL, OM

OBJECTS

To encourage a rational approach to human problems

To provide a constructive alternative to the religious view of life

To promote the maximum use of science for human welfare

To defend freedom of thought and civil liberties

To publish books, pamphlets, and periodicals, and to sponsor conferences and campaigns designed to further these aims and all they entail

WHAT THE RPA DOES TODAY

PUBLICATIONS. — The RPA publishes a wide range of books which enable the intelligent layman to keep abreast of modern thought. Many of these books are available to members at greatly reduced prices.

All members receive two periodicals. THE HUMANIST (incorporating *Literary Guide* and *Rationalist Review*) is an illustrated monthly magazine containing authoritative articles, reviews and comment on public affairs. THE RATIONALIST ANNUAL (formerly *The Agnostic Annual*, founded in 1883 by Charles A. Watts) includes among its contributors some of the most famous thinkers of our time.

PUBLIC CONFERENCE. — A Public Conference lasting four days is held every summer at one of the universities, and members of the RPA can attend at reduced terms.

DISCUSSION GROUPS. — Discussion groups are continually being formed in various parts of the country. Social gatherings are also arranged to enable rationalists to meet.

PROPAGANDA. — Apart from its publishing, the RPA organizes campaigns, petitions Parliament, and sends letters to the Press on specific questions that arise from its principles. Naturally, the more people who join the RPA the more its influence is felt.

Send for full particulars of membership to

THE SECRETARY, RPA LTD, 40 DRURY LANE, LONDON, WC2